

**Top Secret**

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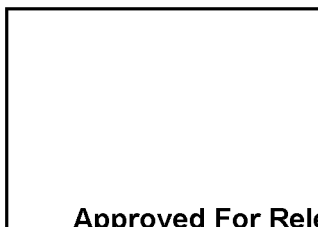


OFFICE OF  
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

## MEMORANDUM

### *Factors Bearing on a Possible Resumption of Arab-Israeli Hostilities*

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6 May 1971

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

6 May 1971

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Factors Bearing on a Possible Resumption of  
Egyptian-Israeli Hostilities\*

NOTE

The last estimate on this subject [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] March 1971, remains generally valid. The  
situation continues in flux, however, and we will in due  
course be taking another longer range view. In the mean-  
time, this memorandum is intended to give our present  
reading of developments and prospects.

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\* This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National  
Estimates and coordinated within CIA.

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## I. THE DIPLOMATIC SETTING

1. For the past nine months there has been no major shooting between the Israelis and the Egyptians. Neither side has seen advantage in resuming the fighting and both have focused their attention on the course of diplomatic negotiations revolving around the Jarring mission, President Sadat's statement of willingness to conclude a peace agreement with Israel, his proposal for reopening the Suez Canal as an interim step, and Secretary of State Rogers' trip to the area. Egypt sees hope that these developments may lead to Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories; Israel fears isolation in the world community if it simply refuses to explore these initiatives, but is concerned lest military withdrawal weaken its security.

2. The question then is whether -- and how long -- this no-war no-peace situation will last. The following considerations are relevant to whether hostilities will break out again, or whether there will be moves toward accommodation, or simply indefinite continuation of the status quo.

a. *Egypt.* Sadat is showing himself to be effectively in charge and committed to trying for a political settlement.

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He has fired Vice President Ali Sabri, who appears to have opposed the search for peace through diplomacy -- though this was not the only bone of contention between them. There may be some discontent among lower ranking officers in the armed forces and among the leaders of the Arab Socialist Union, but these elements are not now in position to sidetrack the peace initiative which has the broad support of the country as a whole. At the same time, Sadat has covered his flanks in the Arab world by leading Egypt into a tripartite Federation of Arab Republics with Libya and Syria which is scheduled to come into existence after a referendum on 1 September 1971. The somewhat distant date for consummation of this federation may represent an effort to set another deadline for Israel to move toward a peace settlement. Even if the federation comes into being, it is not likely to limit Sadat's options in dealing with the Israelis very much.

b. *Israel*. Although Tel Aviv long refused to set its terms for a settlement with any precision, over time the general Israeli position has visibly hardened. The Israeli Cabinet, which once expressed willingness to return to prewar borders in exchange for a binding peace agreement with the Arabs, has since the end of 1968 been demanding border changes

as the only way to ensure "peace". While Israeli leaders are willing to consider partial withdrawal from the territories Israel occupies, they now regard their present borders as offering a significant measure of physical security against the Arabs. As for Soviet military intervention, which would make these considerations of geographical security almost meaningless, the Israelis believe Moscow is not likely to take an active part in attacking them, and in any event they expect that Soviet intervention would quickly involve the US in defense of Israel. In this situation, Tel Aviv has stonewalled Jarring's mediation effort and has preferred to work through the US to explore an interim Suez arrangement. But Israeli terms are so far from what Cairo is contemplating that it will be difficult indeed even to use them as a basis for negotiations.

## II. THE MILITARY SITUATION

3. Both sides are seeking to improve their military capability. The UAR strengthened its defensive position markedly in the spring and summer of 1970 when the Soviet Union first introduced the SA-3 and then took advantage of the cease-fire to deploy a large number of SAMs near the Suez Canal. At this time, too the USSR began playing a more direct role in defense of Egyptian airspace.

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[REDACTED] These developments, coming on the heels of unfavorable world reaction to Israeli air raids, discouraged Tel Aviv from resuming deep penetrations and subsequently Israeli overflights have been limited to Egyptian-held territory near the Suez Canal.

4. Since September 1970 more than 70 additional surface-to-air missile sites have been built, perhaps half near the Answan Dam and the barrages of Naj Hammadi, Asyut, and Isna.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Some of these are undoubtedly replacements for losses and for Mig-21s that date back to 1967 and before; hence, the expansion of the Egyptian airforce has been modest. While pilot training has also been accelerated since September, an acute shortage of qualified Egyptian pilots still severely limits use of available planes.

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6. For all this Soviet equipment, reemphasizing the deep Soviet commitment to the defense of Egypt, the UAR forces still lack offensive capability. Egyptian ground forces have no chance of successfully crossing the Suez Canal and holding any territory on the east bank. In this regard, the most that the UAR could expect to carry out with any chance of success would be a limited commando-type strike against an Israeli strong point in the Sinai. Although the Egyptians could also renew the "war of attrition" by resuming artillery fire across the Canal, this would have little military benefit. It would almost certainly trigger Israeli action that could result in new and substantial losses



for UAR forces. In short, Egyptian defensive capabilities have improved but their offensive capabilities have not.

7. Israel too has been improving its military position.

In recent months, Tel Aviv has been receiving additional F-4s;

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The

Israelis are also receiving

[REDACTED]

advanced electronic countermeasure systems for their aircraft.

At the same time, the Israeli forces have markedly boosted their capability to airlift combat troops by the addition of American-

made CH-53-C assault helicopters,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

8. On the ground, Israel has considerably strengthened its defensive positions and has widened its defensive barrier in the Suez Canal area.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

9. In contrast to Egypt, the Israeli Defense Force retains great offensive capability. While the Israelis would be reluctant to accept the heavier rate of casualties probably now required for effective air strikes against the Egyptian surface-to-air missile complexes near the Canal, they could engage in a number of alternative operations to humiliate the UAR. It is always hazardous to predict what the resourceful Israeli armed forces might try in these circumstances, but a resumption of deep penetration air raids or commando raids south of the Canal would be well within Israeli capability. In any event, the Israeli military command generally acknowledges that the current Soviet programs of support to the UAR have by no means been sufficient to alter Israel's military superiority over Egypt and the other Arab states.

### III. THE CHANCES OF HOSTILITIES

10. As long as there is any prospect of results from the present diplomatic initiatives, Cairo is not likely to break the de facto cease-fire. The Egyptians have abandoned their insistence on setting a deadline for the cease-fire. Further, Sadat has committed his prestige to a diplomatic course; hence, he will want to give the present negotiations a chance. Even if accidental

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violations of the cease-fire were to occur, Cairo would almost certainly attempt to dampen tensions and prevent a resumption of major hostilities as long as active exploration of a settlement was in train.

11. The Israelis too are unlikely to end the cease-fire under present circumstances. They occupy defensible positions which could not readily be improved by military action. They have profited from the lull in fighting and they are aware of the long-range vulnerability in a war of attrition. Moreover, in their present isolation they do not want the onus for willfully blocking efforts for a solution of the Arab-Israeli dispute. Particularly they do not wish to alienate the US, their main source of military, diplomatic, and economic support. Moreover, encouraged by Sadat's present concessions, they believe that in time the Egyptians will move even closer to their terms. Nonetheless, if they came to feel under heavy pressure to make concessions they deemed dangerous to their security, they might as a last resort -- with or without some pretext -- breach the cease-fire in order to bring the diplomatic effort to a close and to dramatize the military threat to Israel.

12. The negotiations pose a dilemma for the Soviets. On the one hand, they would not like to see a resumption of hostilities,

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for this would involve unwelcome risks and uncertainties, possibly including confrontation with the US. They have thus encouraged the Jarring mission and negotiations of the "Big Four". At the same time, Moscow would like to see the Suez Canal reopened and no doubt favors in principle Sadat's proposal for an interim arrangement. But the present turn of events, which has put the Jarring effort on the back burner, has cast the US in a mediatory role. Moscow has already shown signs of irritation that the US is playing such a prominent part, as the Soviets would not want Washington to gain the credit if some successful Suez arrangement should result.

13. If the momentum appears to go out of the effort to settle the Arab-Israeli dispute by agreement, Sadat's position in Egypt and the Arab world would be weakened and he would be impelled to abandon his conciliatory policy. He has in some measure staked his future on his success in extracting significant reciprocal concessions from the Israelis. If his calculations are shown to be in error, his opponents would be likely to seek to capitalize on the disillusionment that almost inevitably would accompany a return to the evident stalemate of the past. And if Sadat were to be ousted in this situation,

his successor would probably be more intractable in regard to Israel and more hostile to the US. In short, the forces of moderation that have appeared on the Egyptian scene since Nasser's death would be dealt a heavy blow.

14. Indeed, if visible progress toward a solution is not recorded within a few months -- or if there is an obvious break in the course of diplomatic negotiations -- the Egyptians are likely to despair of diplomacy as a means of settling the conflict with Israel. They would probably read this failure as proof that whenever they offer concessions, the Israeli position only hardens.

15. This is not to say that if the Egyptians despair of a political settlement they would promptly initiate major fighting. They have little reason to believe that this would get them very far either -- even if they had the stomach for it. But in the frustration and bitterness that such a mood would engender, minor violations of the cease-fire could escalate into major fighting.

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In sum, in the absence of sustained progress toward a solution the chances of hostilities will grow.

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